

# **Montana Special Education Focused Intervention Process**



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Technical Assistance guides are developed by the Division of Special Education to provide guidance to schools, parents and advocates regarding eligibility for and the implementation of services to students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Administrative Rules of Montana and Montana statutes.

This document contains recommended practices and procedures that may enhance the services to children and youth with disabilities. All policy statements regarding the delivery of special education and related services are contained in the current *Montana State Plan Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*.

If you have questions regarding the Special Education Focused Intervention Process after reviewing this guide, please contact the Division of Special Education at 444-5661.

**[www.opi.state.mt.us/speced/](http://www.opi.state.mt.us/speced/)**

## What is Focused Intervention?

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education has developed an accountability system that incorporates procedures for selecting states for inclusion in focused monitoring activities. The OSEP has termed this process the *Continuous Improvement and Focused Monitoring System* (CIFMS) and has developed a method for examining certain outcome indicators that are felt to be key performance indicators of student success. The OSEP annually reviews the performance of states on the key indicators to determine where to focus their monitoring resources. Priorities are those elements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) “that, if fully implemented, would make a significant difference for infants and toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities” (OSEP, 2002). For each priority area, indicators have been identified that are the measures of how well the priority has been implemented. There are only a few indicators for which data are currently available. Thus, the OSEP chose to compare states on only these few indicators:

- Dropout rates for students with disabilities
- Graduation rates for students with disabilities compared with the Regular Education Graduation Rate
- Percentage of students exiting special education with a diploma
- Percentage of students in Public/Private Separate School Facility
- Percentage of students outside the regular class less than 21%
- Percentage of students outside the regular class more than 60%

In addition to these indicators, Section 616 of IDEA 2004 requires the United States Department of Education to set as a priority monitoring states based on disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services, to the extent the representation is the result of inappropriate identification.

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has a responsibility to provide general supervision of the implementation of the requirements of the IDEA. In the past, this responsibility has been met using a compliance monitoring process that involved on-site record reviews and other activities designed to ensure that a school system was complying with the process and procedural requirements of the IDEA. Most recently, these activities have evolved into the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process that included a self-assessment component and that was based upon a system improvement model. This activity was similar to the 5-Year Comprehensive Education Planning process that has been adopted by the Board of Public Education as a required activity for all school systems. Since the advent of the 5-year planning process, the OPI has again refined the approach to meeting its general supervision responsibilities. This will be accomplished through a combination of cyclical compliance monitoring and “Focused Intervention” activities.

“Focused Intervention” is modeled after the Continuous Improvement and Focused Monitoring System used by the OSEP and is the method Montana will use for selecting school systems for participation in activities aimed at improving outcomes for all students. School systems identified for intervention will work closely with the Office of Public Instruction staff to determine what factors have contributed to a low performance on an outcome measure, develop and implement strategies to address the low performance and/or to revise the district’s 5-year Comprehensive Education Plan for improvement.

## **What are the Performance Indicators for Montana?**

A performance indicator is a measure of how well a priority is being implemented. Key performance indicators are those data that are strongly related to positive outcomes for children with disabilities. The performance indicators for Montana are<sup>1</sup>:

- Disproportionate representation of minority children in special education
- Dropout rates for students with disabilities
- Graduation rates for students with disabilities compared to Regular Education graduation rates
- Percentage of students exiting special education with a diploma
- Educational Environments Data:
  - Percentage of students in a Public/Private Separate School Facility
  - Percentage of students outside regular classes less than 21% of the time
  - Percentage of students outside regular classes more than 60% of the time

Additional performance indicators may be added as more data become available and/or to reflect changes in the state-level reporting requirements from the OSEP.

## **What factors will influence selection for Focused Intervention activities?**

District selection is based upon a variety of factors. Performance indicator data are reviewed for each district and their standing relative to the statewide average for the indicator. For the purposes of these comparisons, districts are grouped by enrollment count into thirteen groups.<sup>2</sup> This allows a comparison between districts of similar size and resources. These data will be used, in part, to determine which districts will receive intervention assistance activities during the following school year. Other factors that will be part of the selection process will include: statewide areas of improvement targeted by the OSEP, areas of concern identified in Montana's Annual Performance Report, districts that are identified as "High Risk" grantees by the OPI Fiscal Services Division and other areas as determined by the OPI staff.

## **What will the Focused Intervention activities include?**

Focused Intervention activities based upon this approach will vary depending on the nature and severity of the concerns noted. These activities may include:

- OPI/district review of district activities related to key indicators

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A contains the definition and formula used for each of the performance indicators.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix B contains a description of the thirteen enrollment groups.

- Facilitated in-house improvement planning
- School-to-school networking
- OPI-facilitated technical assistance
- Other activities that the OPI staff determine are necessary

Procedures for each of these activities are detailed later in this document.

### **What about those districts that are strong performers on the key indicators?**

Districts selected from the top 5 percent on one or more of the performance indicators will be asked to conduct a simple review of district programs specific to those indicators and to provide to the OPI a description of the activities, policies and procedures that the district feels contributes to the positive outcomes for children. These reports will be available as examples of promising practices that other districts could use as models for developing improvement strategies. This activity will not be an in-depth assessment; rather, it will be an opportunity for a school district to share with others those activities that the district feels have contributed to positive outcomes for children.

### **Focused Intervention Activities and Responsibilities**

One of the key elements of the Focused Intervention process is the individualized nature of the activities that result from a school system's selection. This process is intended to allow a tremendous amount of flexibility in the design and application of system level interventions. Each intervention will include a review of the district's special education policies and procedures and a review of the results of the most recent compliance monitoring in addition to whatever other activities are selected.

#### **OPI/District Review of District Activities Related to Key Indicators**

The school system will provide the OPI staff with information regarding programs or services currently in place that are targeted at improving the outcomes for students related to a specific performance indicator. The OPI staff will review this information and the school's 5-year Comprehensive Education Plan and work with the school system and other OPI divisions to facilitate the coordination of the various activities and programs involved.

#### **Facilitated In-house Improvement Planning**

The OPI staff will meet with the school system's 5-year Education Improvement Planning Team to facilitate an in-depth review of the system's improvement plan and data for the purpose of determining if the current improvement plan's goals and procedures are adequate to result in meaningful change in the areas of concern.

#### **OPI Facilitated Technical Assistance**

The OPI staff will provide technical assistance and assist the school system in developing and delivering personnel training regarding special education procedures, effective instructional strategies, dropout prevention and other areas depending on the school's needed improvements.

### **School-to-School Networking**

The OPI staff, in conjunction with the school staff, will facilitate communication between the targeted school and a school identified as a strong performer in the area of concern. This communication may take the form of:

- Improvement Team members conducting a site visit
- The model school staff making a presentation to the receiving school
- Other approaches that the team develops

## References

Office of Special Education Programs (2002). Focused Monitoring: A Model for the Present.

## Glossary of Terms

**Focused Monitoring** —the Office of Special Education Programs procedures for selecting states for targeted intervention and compliance monitoring.

**Focused Intervention**—the Montana Office of Public Instruction’s procedures for selecting school districts for targeted assistance in improving educational outcomes for all children.

**Performance Indicator**—a data element that is felt to be a good indicator of how well a school has implemented the priorities of the IDEA.

## Appendix A:

### Disproportionate representation of minority children in special education

System Name:		Nicaville Public Schools				
Race/Ethnicity	Enrollment Count	Enrollment Percentage	Child Count	Child Count Percentage	Absolute Difference	Relative Size of Difference
American Indian/Alaskan Native	9	1.25%	4	5.71%	4.46%	3.5651
Asian American	5	0.70%	0	0.00%	-0.70%	-1.0000
Hispanic or Latino	4	0.56%	0	0.00%	-0.56%	-1.0000
Black or African American	6	0.83%	1	1.43%	0.59%	0.7119
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0
White, Non-Hispanic	695	96.66%	65	92.86%	-3.80%	-0.0394

A comparison of the percentage of students of a particular race/ethnic origin receiving special education services to the percentage of students of that race/ethnic origin in the entire student population of a given school system. This is represented as the Relative Size of the Difference between the enrollment percentage and the child count percentage for each race/ethnic origin category.

Disproportionality data calculations use students with disabilities, ages 6-21 and enrollment data, K-12.

#### Data Notes for Disproportionality Calculation

*The Calculation:*

To calculate and assess disproportionate representation of minority children in special education, you calculate:

- the percent distribution by Race/Ethnicity for regular education enrollment, ages 6-21 as reported on the October 1<sup>st</sup> Enrollment count
- the percent distribution by Race/Ethnicity for students with disabilities (all disabilities) as reported on the December 1<sup>st</sup> child count.

Both R/E percentage distributions will equal 100% of the total count, respectively.

To find the **Relative Difference** of the size between the child count percentage and the regular education percentage, you must first find the **Absolute Difference**.

**Absolute Difference** = child count percentage minus regular education percentage; then

**Relative Difference** = absolute difference/regular education percentage



The relative difference is used to determine if a particular R/E category is either *over-represented* or *under-represented* by comparing it to the **relative difference statewide**.

*The Formulas:*

Enrollment Pct = Enrollment Count by District & Race / Total enrollment count by District

Special Ed Pct = Child Count by District & Race / Total child count by District

Absolute Difference = Special Ed Pct minus Enrollment Pct

Relative Difference = Absolute Difference / Enrollment Pct

**Note:** Under the current data collection system, the October 1<sup>st</sup> enrollment count is an aggregated count in that the count is not separated by subgroups, (i.e., special education, free/reduced lunch, Title 1).

The October 1st Enrollment count and the December 1<sup>st</sup> Special Education Child Count are *two separate data collections* taken at *two separate times*,

### **Dropout rates for students with disabilities**

<b>System Name:</b>	<b>School Leavers</b>	<b>Dropouts</b>	<b>Dropout Rate %</b>
Nicaville Public Schools	8	2	25.0%

Calculated by dividing the number of students with disabilities who drop out by the number of students with disabilities who leave school for another reason.

Dropout rates are for students with disabilities, ages 14-21+, and dropout counts and enrollment, grades 7-12.

### **Graduation rates for students with disabilities compared to Regular Education Graduation Rate**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>IDEA Graduates</b>	<b>Regular Ed Graduates</b>	<b>IDEA % Graduates</b>	<b>Reg Ed % Graduates</b>	<b>Relative Size of Difference</b>
Nicaville Public Schools	6	90	75.0%	81.1%	-0.08

This is a comparison of the percentage of students exiting special education with a diploma to the graduation rate for regular education.

The regular education graduation rate is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Graduation rate = for year } t \frac{\text{Number of high school completers at year } t}{\text{Number of high school completers at year } t + \text{Number of Grade 12 dropouts at year } t + \text{Number of Grade 11 dropouts at year } t-1 + \text{Number of Grade 10 dropouts at year } t-2 + \text{Number of Grade 9 dropouts at year } t-3}$$

Graduation rates are for students with disabilities, ages 14-21+

### Data Notes for Dropout Rates

- Montana's dropout rate for students with disabilities is calculated using the following method:  
Dropout Rate = # of students with disabilities dropping out of school / # of students with disabilities leaving school

Where: School Leavers include students who:  
graduated with a diploma,  
received a certificate,  
dropped out, or  
reached maximum age.

- Dropout numbers for students with disabilities are reported each spring at the end of the school year as part of a larger data collection on students with disabilities exiting special education.

### Data Limitations

- Because the number of students enrolled for small schools and racial minority groups is relatively low, small annual changes in data can cause wide variations in annual completion, graduation, and dropout rates. For example, in a class with 10 students, one dropout would translate to a 10 percent dropout rate. A more realistic indicator for small schools and racial minority groups is an average of several years.
- Currently, Montana does not have an individual student information system and, therefore, cannot track individuals across schools and school years. The OPI collects aggregate enrollment, graduate, and dropout counts each fall from schools and data on students with disabilities is also a separate data collection, which carries with it the risk of misclassification of student data (i.e., reporting a student's race/ethnicity inconsistently between enrollment and dropout data collections, reporting a transfer student a dropout).

System Name:	School Leavers	Graduates	Graduation Rate
Nicaville Public Schools	8	5	62.5%

### Percentage of students exiting special education with a diploma

Calculated by dividing the number of students with disabilities graduating with a diploma by the number of students with disabilities leaving school.

### Data Notes for Graduation Rates

- Montana's graduation rate for regular education is an estimated cohort group rate that is calculated by the method recommended by the NCES:

$$\text{Completion Rate} = \frac{g_t}{g_t + d_{12t} + d_{11}(t-1) + d_{10}(t-2) + d_9(t-3)}$$

Where:  $g$  = # of graduates receiving a standard high school diploma

$t$  = year of graduation

$d$  = dropouts

12, 11, 10, 9 = class level

- Montana's graduation rate for students with disabilities is calculated using the following method:

Graduation Rate = # of students with disabilities receiving a diploma / # of students with disabilities leaving school

Where: School Leavers include students who graduated with a diploma, received a certificate, dropped out, or reached maximum age.

- Montana accredited high schools report graduate numbers to the OPI each fall for the previous school year. Graduate numbers for students with disabilities are reported each spring at the end of the school year as part of a larger data collection on students with disabilities exiting special education.

#### *Data Limitations*

- Because the number of students enrolled for small schools and racial minority groups is relatively low, small annual changes in data can cause wide variations in annual completion, graduation, and dropout rates. For example, in a class with 10 students, one dropout would translate to a 10 percent dropout rate. A more realistic indicator for small schools and racial minority groups is an average of several years.
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### **Educational Environments Data:**

The following percentages are calculated by dividing the number of students in a particular setting by the total number of special education students in all settings for each school system.

Educational environment data calculations use students with disabilities, ages 6-21 and enrollment data, K-12.

#### **Percentage of students in a Public/Private Separate School Facility**

Percentage of students receiving special education and related services while placed in a facility outside of the public school.

**Percentage of students outside regular class less than 21 percent of the time.**

Percentage of students receiving special education and related services for less than 21 percent of the school day.

**Percentage of students outside regular class more than 60 percent of the time.**

Percentage of students receiving special education and related services for more than 60 percent of the school day.

## **Appendix B:**

### **Size Groupings for Data Comparison:**

- 1H – High school districts with more than 1250 students**
- 2H – High school districts with between 401 and 1250 students**
- 3H – High school districts with between 201 and 400 students**
- 4H – High school districts with between 76 and 200 students**
- 5H – High school districts with 75 or fewer students**
- 1K – K-12 Schools with more than 399 students**
- 2K – K-12 Schools with 399 or fewer students**
- 1E – Elementary Districts with more than 2500 students**
- 2E – Elementary Districts with between 851 and 2500 students**
- 3E – Elementary Districts with between 401 and 850 students**
- 4E – Elementary Districts with between 151 and 400 students**
- 5E – Elementary Districts with between 41 and 150 students**
- 6E – Elementary Districts with 40 or fewer students**